

Why are wetlands important

Wetlands are among the most biologically productive natural ecosystems in the world. They can be compared to tropical rain forests and coral reefs in the diversity of species they support. There's more life in a healthy wetland than there is in almost any other kind of habitat. Wetlands perform important physical and chemical functions and benefit people in many ways.

1) Wetlands often function like natural tubs or sponges, storing water (floodwater, or surface water that collects in isolated depressions) and slowly releasing it. Trees and other wetland vegetation help slow floodwaters. This combined action, storage and slowing, can lower flood heights and reduce the water's erosive potential. Wetlands thus -

- reduce the likelihood of flood damage to crops in agricultural areas
- help control increases in the rate and volume of runoff in urban areas
- buffer shorelines against erosion.

2) Wetlands are vital to the survival of various plants and animals, including threatened and endangered species. Fish and wildlife use wetlands in many different ways - breeding, feeding, nursing, and more.

- Many migratory birds rest in wetlands on the way to their winter or summer homes. If you visit a wetland in the fall or spring, you could see hundreds or even thousands of birds.
- The young of certain animals, like fish and crabs, spend their earliest days in wetlands before moving on to open waters. The vegetation in wetlands provides great hiding areas and there is a rich food supply.
- Many of the animals that visit or inhabit wetlands are

endangered. In fact approximately 35 percent of all endangered species live in wetlands.

3) Wetlands are the filters of the water cycle. The intertwining roots, leaves and fibers of the dense plant life remove sediment and pollutants from the slow-moving water. When water runs out of the wetland and returns to a stream, it is once again clean.

4) Wetlands help to maintain water quality by temporarily holding back nutrients and sediment from runoff, allowing many wastes, such as some pesticides, to degrade into less harmful forms.

5) Wetlands help improve water quality, including that of drinking water, by intercepting surface runoff and removing or retaining its nutrients, processing organic wastes, and reducing sediment before it reaches open water.

6) Wetlands trap sediments. As flood waters move through wetlands, silt and sediments settle out. This function helps to prevent streams, lakes, and other bodies of water downstream from getting clogged with a build-up of sediment.

7) Wetlands act as storm breakers. Wetlands protect shoreline areas by breaking the wind and waves from storms.

8) Wetlands are good for the economy. Wetlands furnish a wealth of natural products, including fish, shellfish, timber, wild rice, and furs. In commercial terms, wetland products contribute millions of dollars per year to the nation's economy. In addition to this, an estimated 50 million people spend approximately \$10 billion each year observing and photographing wetlands-dependent birds.

9) Wetlands provide recreational opportunities. Wetlands are an attractive area for visiting and provide opportunities for popular activities including hiking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, and boating and canoeing.

[Why do I need to know if an area is wetlands?](#)

Point of Contact: Regulatory Reception or
Contact a Specific Staff Member

Phone: (206)
764-3495

Email:
MARNE.A.PACKER@USACE.ARMY.MIL